03/29/24 • BIG TECH › NEWS

'Terrifying': Critics Slam Court Orders Requiring Google to Unmask YouTube Viewers

Federal investigators ordered Google to turn over personal information on viewers of specific YouTube videos, according to court documents obtained by Forbes. Privacy experts said the orders violate constitutional rights and turn innocent viewers into criminal suspects.

By John-Michael Dumais

18

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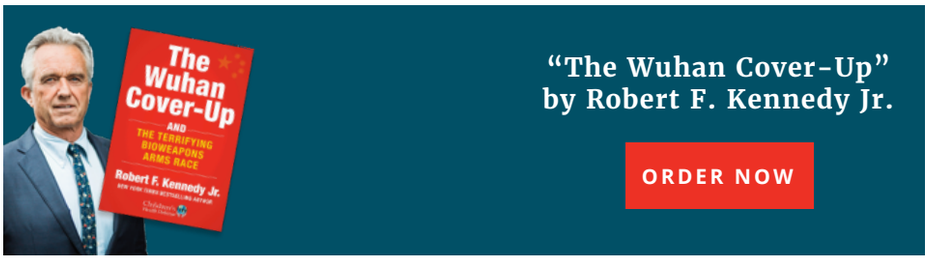
Federal investigators ordered Google to hand over personal information on viewers of specific YouTube videos, prompting questions among privacy experts about the constitutionality of such requests.

The orders, obtained by Forbes, require Google to turn over names, addresses, telephone numbers and user activity for account holders — and IP addresses, numeric identifiers of internet location, of non-account holders — who watched certain videos.

Critics said the demands threaten to turn innocent YouTube viewers into criminal suspects, violating their free speech rights under the First Amendment and privacy rights under the Fourth Amendment.



Unclear if Google complied with orders

In a Kentucky case reviewed by Forbes, undercover police sought to identify the person behind the online moniker "elonmuskwhm," suspected of buying bitcoin for cash in potential violation of money laundering laws and rules governing the transmission of unlicensed money.

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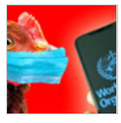
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The police sent links to YouTube tutorials — that collectively garnered over 30,000 views — on drone mapping and augmented reality software and then asked Google for information on anyone who had accessed the videos from Jan. 1-8, 2023.

The court granted the order, but court records don't reveal if Google complied.

In a separate New Hampshire case, Portsmouth police received a threat about an explosive placed in a public trash can, Forbes reported. After searching the area, police discovered they were being watched via a YouTube livestream associated with a local business.

Federal investigators believe events similar to the one in Portsmouth have occurred nationwide and requested that Google provide a list of accounts that "viewed and/or interacted with" eight YouTube livestreams, including one posted by Boston and Maine Live with 130,000 subscribers.

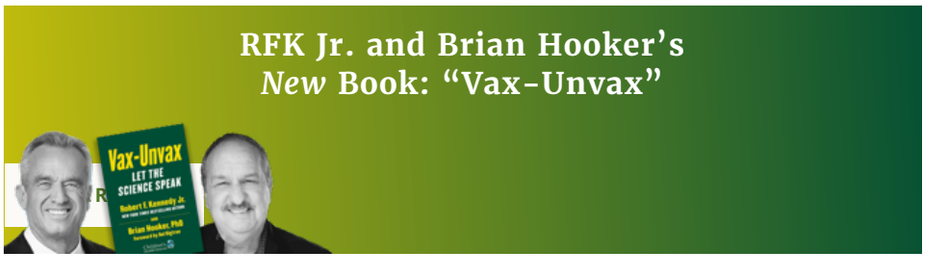
It remains unclear if Google provided the data in this case.

Google spokesperson Matt Bryant said the company has "a rigorous process designed to protect the privacy and constitutional rights of our users while supporting the important work of law enforcement," according to Forbes.

Bryant said Google examines each demand for legal validity, pushes back against overbroad or inappropriate requests and sometimes objects to demands entirely.

Google recently announced an update that will make it technically impossible for the company to provide information in response to geofence orders — orders that seek data from all users within a certain distance from a crime.

This move comes after a California court ruled that a geofence warrant covering several densely populated areas in Los Angeles was unconstitutional, raising hopes that courts would stop police from seeking such data.



YouTube should not identify users 'without a valid warrant'

According to attorney and digital privacy expert Greg Glaser, social media platforms like YouTube are often considered part of the public sphere, and law enforcement agencies typically do a good job handling such evidence.

However, Glaser emphasized that a user's unpublished personal information, such as their name and address associated with their YouTube account, should remain private.

"Without a valid warrant, YouTube should not be revealing to authorities the unpublished personal account details of its users," Glaser told The Defender.

Glaser suggested that when videos depict criminal activity, warrants will be readily issued against those directly involved.

He also noted that for specific offenses, like the pornographic exploitation of children, simply possessing or viewing such videos is rightfully considered a criminal act.

"The right to privacy does not create a right to engage in criminal activity or conspire with criminals," he said.

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Despite this, Glaser acknowledged the need to safeguard against excessive surveillance or "dragnet spying."

"Some states have implemented variations of a 'Fourth Amendment Protection Act'" to address this concern, Glaser said. "These laws respect good police work and also the need for a warrant even in the electronic surveillance age," he said.

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'Unconstitutional' and 'terrifying'

Privacy experts who spoke with Forbes expressed grave concerns about the constitutionality of the court orders, arguing that they threaten to undo constitutional protections.

Albert Fox Cahn, executive director at the Surveillance Technology Oversight Project, called the orders "unconstitutional" and "terrifying," likening them to controversial geofence warrants.

"No one should fear a knock at the door from police simply because of what the YouTube algorithm serves up," Fox Cahn told Forbes. "I'm horrified that the courts are allowing this."

John Davisson, senior counsel at the Electronic Privacy Information Center, echoed Fox Cahn's concerns, emphasizing that online viewing habits can reveal "deeply sensitive information" about individuals, such as their political beliefs, passions and religious views.

"It's fair to expect that law enforcement won't have access to that information without probable cause," Davisson told Forbes. "This order turns that assumption on its head."

Numerous technology publications covered the Forbes article and weighed in on the controversy.

Engadget noted individuals don't have to engage in illegal activities to have their data requested by law enforcement. Such privacy breaches often go unchallenged unless a victim engages in lengthy court battles — sometimes all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court, wrote PCWorld.

Reclaim the Net characterized the government surveillance efforts as "extreme," pointing out that unmasking everyone who watched a particular video "makes everyone a suspect" without probable cause.

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John-Michael Dumais

John-Michael Dumais is a news editor for The Defender. He has been a writer and community organizer on a variety of issues, including the death penalty, war, health freedom and all things related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

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GS
a month ago

DARPA seeded Google - they'll do whatever they want, as always. This "Google vs Federal investigators" is theatrical professional wrestling. First inch in the march to many miles. And being "shocked" at what courts are doing is blasphemously childish by now.

12 0 Reply

GarySummers GS
24 days ago

"Thinking"
Google is Evil, and now a 'Pharmaceutical Company' also.
Google has always been connected to the CIA.
Youtube is now connected to Google! & CIA.
Use a VPN while watching Youtube?

Gary Null & Richard Gale have documented that **Google now has a pharmaceutical division** headed by **GlaxosSmithKline's former chairman of its global vaccine business.** Null & Gale write:

Google today is not only a weapon for promoting the pharmaceutical agenda but now also a drug company itself.
https://organicconsumers.or...

2 0 Reply

sarahhornibrooke
25 days ago

You tube threw me out two days ago.
I have been active, polite and thorough in informing people of the latest developments in WW#,the one we are ALL involved with, they did not like what I was saying, even though much of it has come from their own you tube channels , they had to shut me up.
Do you think it is important that Tennessee Senate ban chemtrails?
Is it note worthy that Ex NZ prime Minister, Ardern teans up with France to run a spy agency out of New Zealand,? Is it concerning that the Australian Senate voted 31 to 30 to investigate the excess deaths and the against were the Greens and the Labours?
You Bet it is and today.. add block is banned on You Tube.
I see them going the same way as that bad beer.. down the tube....

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owned by
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Name Equities %
Vanguard Fiduciary Trust Co. 15.95 % 904,799,079 15.95 %
BlackRock Advisors LLC 10.60 % 601,082,095 10.60 %
Sergey Brin 6.477 % 367,312,400 6.477 %

Fidelity Management & Research Co. LLC 6.065 % 343,940,791 6.065 %
6 more rows

5 0 Reply

G **GarySummers** → sarahhornibrooke
24 days ago

"Thinking"
CIA help create Google, and Google Maps.

4 0 Reply

S **Stuff Happens**
a month ago

“No one has the right to engage in criminal activity” Yeah, see, the problem is, “criminal activity” is whatever they say it is. Why don’t they look in the mirror and maybe explain how come they knew the school shooters, pressure cooker bombers, and many more ACTUAL criminals but yawned about them while salaciously drooling to catch an evil Bitcoiner?

5 0 Reply

N **NikkiB**
25 days ago

So just to get this clear, officials and government leaders engage in corrupt criminal acts and get and give each other immunity and now they want us to be put on even more lists now based not just on our thought and action but our viewing preferences, this proves we should all simply cease using these military technologies. That is what they were from start it is clear now

4 0 Reply

L **LinUK**
a month ago

Ronald Reagan said that the most terrifying words to hear are "I'm from the government and I'm here to help".
Not any more, it's "I'm from the government and I'm here to keep you safe".

4 0 Reply

G **GarySummers** → LinUK
24 days ago

"Interesting"
This Website from a Former IRS Agent, on Americans paying Tax's!

Federal Law Does Not Make The Average American Liable For The Federal Income Tax - Federal tax laws follow a distinctive pattern: a tax is imposed and a person is designated as the responsible party to pay the tax that is imposed. Being designated in the law as the person responsible for paying a particular tax imposed is called being made liable for the tax. This dual tax imposition and tax liability pattern is followed over and over again in federal tax law, yet ordinary Americans living and working in the United States of America have never been made liable for the federal income tax. What is the reason, then, that in the more than 100 years since the 16th Amendment was conceived, Congress has had plenty of time and opportunity to pass a law and send it to the President's desk making the average American living and working in the United States liable to pay the federal income tax and yet no such law is found in the Internal Revenue Code? If being liable for the federal income tax is not is not a critical legal component of owing the federal income tax, why has the IRS made sure to state in the Form 1040 Instruction booklet and elsewhere since the 1970s that Americans must file a return or statement with the IRS for “any tax you are liable for”? Learn more about this topic.
https://www.agentfortruth.com/

3 0 Reply

B **Beatrice** → GarySummers
23 days ago edited

We were only supposed to pay a usage tax, not an income tax. The IRS seems to operate under it's own laws because the feds allow them to for obvious reasons.

Ever watched the doc America: From Freedom to Fascism by Aaron Russo? " Russo connects the dots between money creation, federal income tax, and
the national identity card, which becomes law in May 2008 and will use Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) technology. Could this be a precursor to an impending police state in America? Watch the film and make your own conclusions."

Also, I just learned that the citizens in the EU are refusing to pay their taxes and instead placing them in an escrow account that the government can't touch.

0 0 Reply

Steven Berge → Beatrice
21 days ago

We've been a police state for quite a while. They're labeling peaceful protesters "terrorists" now. Starting with Obama, the president can have you arrested, disappeared or murdered on his command with no questions allowed.

1 0 Reply

Beatrice → Steven Berge
20 days ago

AND detained indefinitely as we've seen with the " 6th" protestors. Yes, this all began with the Patriot Act and then Obama took it to the next level. These despots have been re-writing our constitution and bill of rights for 25 years plus and naive or ignorant citizens have allowed it.

1 0 Reply

Steven Berge → Beatrice
16 days ago

Before the patriot act, the supreme court stated the corporations are people and money is speech. But the constitution doesn't even mention corporations. That's law making without congress. Of course it doesn't matter much, congress is owned too.

1 0 Reply

Beatrice → Steven Berge
16 days ago

Exactly. We are a country without a foundation.

0 0 Reply

Steven Berge → Beatrice
7 days ago

The foundation is rule by wealth.

1 0 Reply

Beatrice → Steven Berge
6 days ago

Yes but wealth isn't any foundation since it can easily crumble into worthless dust.

0 0 Reply

NikkiB → LinUK
25 days ago

Yea and then he put into effect EO 12333

2 0 Reply

Taint Farmer → NikkiB
24 days ago

He also signed into the law the 1986 Child Vaccine Injury Protection Act that gave big pharma permanent immunity from lawsuits for their poisoned needles.

0 0 Reply

Jerry Alatalo
24 days ago

Critics said the demands threaten to turn innocent YouTube viewers into criminal suspects, violating their free speech rights under the First Amendment and privacy rights under the Fourth Amendment.

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It is surprising that YouTube hasn't already taken down/censored the following video, especially when the allegations, in the COVID/mRNA bioweapons context, point to the COVID Pandemic being a covert global biological warfare operation from Day One:

https://onenessofhumanity.w...

1 0 Reply

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